



# IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE

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## **Press Release**

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### **West Nile Infections Contribute to Two Idaho Deaths**

Two elderly Idaho men, both over the age of 70, have died from illnesses associated with West Nile virus, one from Minidoka County and the other from Elmore County. This is the third death associated with West Nile virus from Elmore County, and the first from Minidoka.

“We offer our sympathies to both of their families,” says Dr. Leslie Tengelsen, deputy state epidemiologist. “We don’t believe anything unusual is occurring in Elmore County, it is just that West Nile is frequently more serious in people over the age of 50.” All three Elmore County deaths have occurred in people over 60 years old.

West Nile infections have been associated with six deaths in Idaho this year, five of Idaho residents over 60 and a 12-year-old youth from Massachusetts who also tested positive for Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. A total of 327 Idaho residents have been reported with West Nile infections this year, with 39 of those people suffering from neuroinvasive infections that usually require hospitalization.

Even though 80 percent of people who contract West Nile will not have symptoms of illness, others may experience fever, headaches, body aches or a rash. In rare instances, West Nile can develop into a serious illness that requires hospitalization. “If people have symptoms of West Nile virus that interfere with their daily routines, we encourage them to contact their healthcare provider,” Tengelsen says. “Mosquitoes with West Nile virus can be found across eastern and southern Idaho, so we encourage people to ‘Fight the Bite’ and take precautions by wearing insect repellent when outdoors.”

**(more)**

For personal protection, people are advised to:

- Insect-proof their homes by repairing or replacing screens;
- Reduce standing water on their property that provides mosquito breeding habitat, such as bird baths and decorative ponds;
- Cover up exposed skin when outdoors;
- Apply insect repellent approved by the EPA to exposed skin and clothing. Follow instructions on the product label, especially for children;
- Avoid mosquitoes when they are most active at dawn and dusk; and
- Report dead birds to your local Fish and Game office.

West Nile virus does not appear to affect most animals including dogs and cats, but can cause severe illness in horses and certain species of birds. Although there is not a vaccine available for people, there are several vaccines for horses. Approximately 40 percent of horses which contract West Nile virus will die, so horse owners are encouraged to contact their veterinarian about vaccinating their animals. Horse owners who suspect West Nile viral infection in their animal should contact their veterinarian immediately.

Additional information about the virus is available from the Department of Health and Welfare's web site at <http://www.westnile.idaho.gov> is updated everyday. The Idaho State Department of Agriculture's Urban Pest Management program also has information available on steps to prevent home-grown mosquito infestations. This information is available on ISDA's web site at <http://www.idahoag.us>.

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**(Editors: For more information, please contact Tom Shanahan at 334-0668, or your District Health Department Public Information Officer.)**